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ABSTRACT

The emergence of a sequence in evaluation approaches at the local level during the decade of Title I is discussed. These recurring patterns related to objectives, evaluation designs and data collection modes reflect impact of both external factors (e.g., changes in funding guidelines) and internal factors (e.g., changes in priority needs). However, periodic re-emergence of earlier approaches has been characterized by increasingly more comprehensive purposes, with more specific identification and interrelationship of process and product factors. The spiral sequence thus generates "new" combinations and applications of "old" approaches. (Author/RC)

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THE TITLE I EVALUATION CYCLE:

1965 - 1975

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THE TITLE I EVALUATION CYCLE: 1965 - 1975

The ten years of Title I have witnessed ongoing changes in the nature and procedures of Title I evaluation at the local level. These changes reflect responses to needs and requirements both from within the school system and external to it. The pattern of these changes emerges from a review of evaluations of the past decade, in the context of the circumstances and factors that formed the Title I fabric of which the evaluations were one strand. This retrospective analysis of Title I evaluation in the Cleveland Public Schools yields three overlapping phases.

PHASE 1: 1965 - 1967

The first phase covered the early years or roughly 1965 to 1967. The evaluation procedures of this initial phase reflect the influence of a variety of factors. The guidelines for Title I were interpreted as mandating a general-aid approach. Consequently, for most of the initial years' projects, the only criterion for a pupil to participate was membership in a Title I school. Services were also generalized in nature, encompassing such diffuse or indirect "treatments" as field trips, smorgasbord-type afterschool programs, development of curriculum guides, etc. The generalized quality of the services was accompanied by objectives of similar general nature.

The projects were weathering the installation period with all that that involves in securing and training staff, establishing communication channels, clarifying roles, and obtaining or developing materials. Necessarily, concern had to center first on ensuring that process elements were in place before product outcomes could become a reasonable expectation.

The task of role clarification included the establishment of credibility and trust as applied to evaluators. Project staff tended to be defensive toward or fearful of the consequences of evaluation.

Evaluators, newly "hired on", were defining objectives and developing appropriate instruments and data collection channels. Resources such as computer programs were being secured. Formats were being evolved for reports and for feedback procedures to project staff.

Against this backdrop, the evaluations of the initial years were characterized by an emphasis on process assessment documenting the congruence between proposed and actual procedural elements (provision of staff, facilities, materials) and further documenting the perceptions of project participants and staff.

Data collection employed site-visitation teams, interview and questionnaire data, and locally-constructed rating scales and attitude instruments. Standardized-test data were used on only a limited basis. Data analysis was primarily descriptive in nature.

For both project implementation and evaluation, the first phase of Title I was a period of ground breaking.

PHASE 2: 1968 - 1972

The second phase, roughly spanning the period from 1968 through 1972, marked a shift in evaluation focus and design. The emergence of new directions during the second phase represented, in part, a shift in evaluation consistent with the "maturation" of the initial projects--i.e., projects had moved beyond the installation phase, thus making product assessment appropriate. The second-phase characteristics further reflected the "maturation" of evaluation roles and procedures. Project staff perceptions of evaluation became more positive--or, at least, more tolerant and less

defensive. A closer working relationship was established between evaluators and project staff, with systematic feedback of evaluation results to project staff, and with increasing recognition that evaluation could contribute to project improvement as well as fulfill the required legalities of funding.

In addition to these concomitants of normal growth, the second phase was influenced by a critical external development. The state's reinterpretation of the guidelines mandated a change from a general-aid approach to a categorical-aid approach. The change gave impetus to more definitive criteria of pupil eligibility for a given project. Necessarily, this was accompanied by more specific definition of treatment components, and more precise statements of both process and product objectives. Several earlier projects of a general-aid quality were replaced by projects of the categorical-aid type. These latter projects had structures that permitted randomized experimental-control designs.

Evaluations of this second phase reflected an emphasis on pupil-centered assessment of product outcomes. Classical and more complex research designs were applied, employing randomized experimental-control groups, examination of differential impact of treatment variables, use of multivariate analysis, etc.

Designs required extensive use of standardized tests on a pre-post basis. There was continued use of locally-constructed instruments but with determination of validity, reliability, and factor structure.

PHASE 3: 1973 -

The third phase--from 1973 to the present- continued the emphasis on clearly specified process and product objectives. The use of standardized testing on a pre-post basis remained an essential element, as did the collec-

tion of process and demographic data, and the documentation of perceptions of staff, pupils and parents.

Two definable changes in emphasis emerged. First, randomized experimental-control designs, which had appeared in the previous phase, were no longer used. Instead, measures of student progress were based on standards such as expected progress or pre-specified gain scores. Second, the assessment of process dimensions reflected an increasing concern with the content of instructional services being given to children. Observation of project activities received more intensive attention.

The characteristics of the third-phase evaluations were associated with several factors. The demise of the classical experimental-control design was a consequence of a directive from the state level requiring that pupils with the greatest need be given first priority for service. The attention focused on in-depth process definition was a natural consequence of those project evaluations which documented marked success in reaching product objectives. In effect, systematic observation data attempted to more clearly define the treatment which was bringing about the successful outcomes.

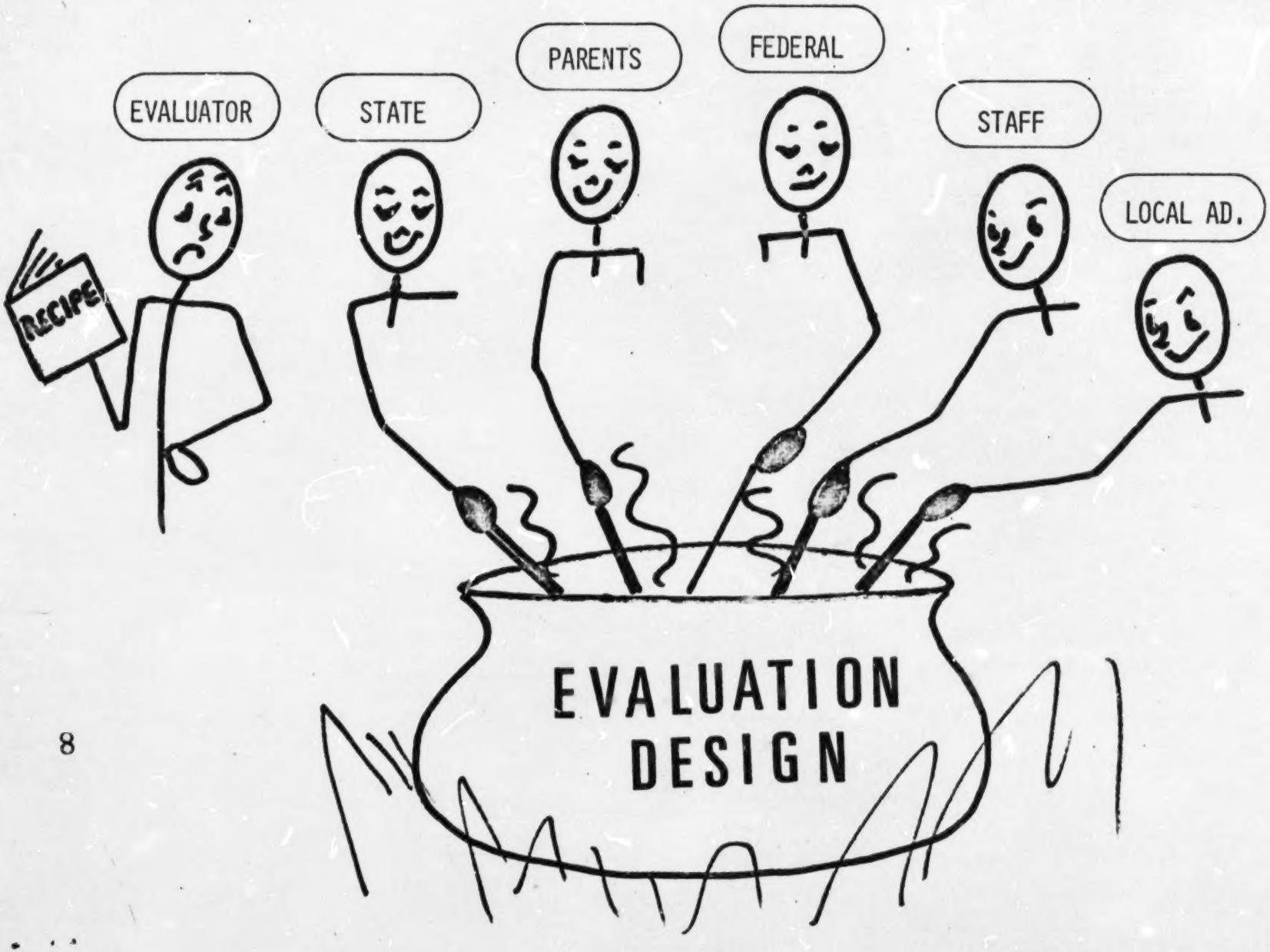
The third phase was also marked by a close working relationship between evaluation and project staffs. In general, project staffs have come to view evaluation as an activity in which they have an important role. This role has been exercised through helping define objectives (when proposals are being written), assisting in the refinement of instruments to effect greater congruence with project intentions, considering evaluative feedback to project staff as part of project activities, and incorporating data-collection procedures into ongoing project operations.

In summary, the patterns emerging from the three evaluation phases reveal both change and maintenance in evaluation procedures. Data collection modes of the earlier years--site visitation, observations, interviews--not only remain important but have become more systematic and specifically focused on key programmatic intentions. The concept of formal pre-post assessment not only remains basic to Title I but has become an accepted element of the general instructional programming.

Some of the initial problems remain as well. The basic evaluation question continues to be a dilemma; how much would a child have progressed without Title I? The guidelines preclude using a randomized experimental-control design. Even if such a design were permitted, other realities complicate the neat statistics. Thus, for example, high pupil mobility is a fact of life beyond the school's control. This mobility produces interruptions in treatment and differential treatment within a project.

Our evaluation data document the marked improvements that result from delivery of service on a systematic and long-term basis. Summaries of participants' pre-post gains have been impressive, but the gap between norm levels and participants' performance levels is difficult to close. Reducing or eliminating the gap requires acceleration sustained over many years.

A fourth phase of Title I evaluation may now be emerging. One contributing factor is the development of more sophisticated and systematic needs assessment procedures. Another is the mandating of a new unit of measurement--the NCE or normal-curve equivalent--for documenting pupil change in performance. Still other factors are the increasing pressure of project staff to use criterion-referenced measures for product assessment, and the possibility of court-ordered busing.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